

STYLE & FASHION

It's Really Not a Big Deal

How the Insta-famous tiny bag went from absurd viral joke to a liberating everyday essential

By KATHARINE K. ZARRELLA

WHEN proton-size purses went viral in 2019, sensible sorts dismissed the trend as a mildly amusing Instagram joke. “Come on, what can you really carry in that?” Michele Vidal, 36, thought to herself each time she saw an itsy-bitsy Jacquemus Le Chiquito bag, the Petit version of which is just 2 inches long, on her social media feed. Such minuscule designs seemed better suited for her 8-year-old daughter’s doll than a full-grown woman. Recently, however, the Easton, Penn.-based lifestyle influencer has revised her position. “They’re totally functional,” said Ms. Vidal, who now owns three micro bags, including a gilded Chanel number she had a personal shopper track down in Hong Kong. “I’m always shopping for them. It’s kind of an obsession.”

Women are trading oversize totes for the once-mocked mini-bag.

After a mostly handbag-free lockdown, women are rethinking their overstuffed carryalls, those bottomless, 13-plus-inch bags they used to lug to work. Such a bag could easily house a laptop, a wallet, a cosmetics case bursting with superfluous makeup, a S’well bottle, that novel they’ve been meaning to start, some ballet flats, workout clothes, and the double-chocolate cookie from Pret a Manger that they were so looking forward to eating but can’t because it’s eternally buried somewhere between the novel and the cosmetics case.

Now, as the U.S. reopens, some women want to move beyond the pack-mule-like existence those bags perpetuate. So they’re trading jumbo totes for the once-mocked mini bag.

Christina Sanchez, a Los Angeles corporate visual merchandiser and recent tiny-bag convert, said micro styles have helped her maintain a more minimal lifestyle—or at least schlep around less stuff. “It’s like I’m free,” said Ms. Sanchez, 32. Since returning to the office in December, she’s relied on a trio of minis, one as small as her hand. With a hint of disbelief, she recalled that most days pre-lockdown, she’d haul around at least a pound of unnecessary accoutrements. Now, she’s whittled her daily cargo down to the bare essentials: “My [credit] card, my ID, maybe some cash, and my vaccine card.” And while not all her miniatures can accommodate her phone on top of that, she’d rather stick it in her pocket than revisit a bulkier bag.

Ms. Vidal, the influencer, shares that view. “My phone is always in my



SMALL WONDERS Five itty-bitty bags that span the teenyverse, from a mind-bogglingly micro Hermès Kelly to a 5.3-by-3.5-inch Bottega Veneta that comfortably fits your iPhone (but not much else). Clockwise from top left: Bag, \$3,500, Dior, 212-931-2950; Bag Trio, \$2,825, Chanel, 212-355-5050; Bag, \$890, preorder at bottegabeneta.com; Bag, \$3,625, available starting September at Hermès, 212-751-3181; Bag, \$1,350, loewe.com

pocket or my hand...I don’t remember the last time I had it in my bag,” she said. She also appreciates that, “after years of carrying so much stuff for everybody,” the minis dissuade her husband and four children from burdening her with their inconvenient effects. “It’s life-changing.”

Over the past year, Harriet Hawksworth, the editor in chief of online retailer Farfetch, has seen interest in tiny bags rise. “We thought it was a bit of a fad,” she said. “But it’s really continued to grow.” To meet demand, brands, luxe or not, have added bitty bags to their selections. Zara sells a hardware-embellished one for \$50; starting in September, Hermès will offer a 3.4-by-3.4-inch Kelly bag for \$3,635 (above); and last month, Christian Dior introduced micro versions of its most recognizable bags, including the 4.7-by-3.9-inch iteration of the Lady Dior (above). While Ms. Hawksworth predicts women will use a mix of handbag sizes once they re-

turn to the office, the micro bag “is not going anywhere.”

A combination of factors has fueled the teeny bag surge. For starters, “a lot of people are more conscious about what they touch right now,” said Saisangeeth Daswani, who analyzes fashion and beauty at London trends-intelligence company Stylus. She means germs. Mini bags have less contamination-prone surface area, and most come with cross-body straps, negating the need to fling them on grimy subway benches or atop sticky bars. The pandemic-era popularity of Marie Kondo-ish downsizing also played a role. “People are being much more mindful about their consumption and how much stuff they actually need around them,” said Ms. Daswani. Our increasingly digital existence is relevant, too. “There’s Apple Pay and credit cards. In most cities, that’s all you need,” said Jesse Dorsey, the Milan-based co-founder and creative director of Boyy, an ac-



Bobby Surreal Bag, \$495, boyy.com

cessories brand that offers an array of buckle-embellished minis.

Still, the mini-bag obsession surprises Mr. Dorsey. “As much as I love them, I’m like, ‘Who’s going to buy these?’ But it seems you just can’t get small enough.” Social media, he said, has only whetted the appetite. “They have so much visual punch...[They] almost look animated,” which makes them prime Instagram fodder. Last week, the rapper Lizzo posted a

photo that shows her wielding a silver Fendi Nano Baguette. It has over 323,000 likes.

The novelty aspect is what drove Katie Garnish, a Harpenden, U.K.-based freelance writer, to buy an 3-inch-long, lemon-yellow bag last month. While she’d grown tired of her unwieldy satchel—in which she’d cram her laptop, sunglasses, lunch, “a whole pharmacy” and “other junk”—what sold her on the tiny bag was its “hilarious” dinkiness. “I think it makes people look really stupid,” said Ms. Garnish, 25. “I [wanted] to look ridiculous.” Disorientingly, she found it practical. At least once a week, it transports her keys and mask, often to the pub. It’s also lifted her spirits. “I’ve been sad for the last 18 months so I bought myself a tiny handbag,” she said. “It’s a fashionable thing that’s really playful and everyone can join in and find it funny. Does that not just make you happy?” At least as happy as a double-chocolate cookie.

‘I’m Going on Vacation—and I Can’t Quite Remember What to Pack’

Dressing post-lockdown is tricky. Filling a suitcase with stylish looks? A distant memory. These chic jet-setters offer some help.

IF YOU’RE STILL adjusting to getting dressed up again, the task of selecting a suitable assortment of vacation outfits can be unnerving. After being grounded for over a year, even seasoned travelers admit to struggling with what was once a reflexive

habit. “I forgot how to pack!” said Dallas-based U Beauty founder Tina Chen Craig who, pre-Covid, would typically travel every two weeks. Whether you’re headed to the uneventful countryside or planning an intense tropical holiday, your pack-

ing process needn’t be daunting. Below, four fashionable globe-trotters recall the most useful items they brought on recent trips to very different destinations. Plus, the regrettable pieces they should have left behind. —Laura Neilson



Keep Up in the Country

Planning a bucolic escape? Then practical footwear and bug spray are musts, said celebrity stylist Micaela Erlanger. Based between New York and Miami, Ms. Erlanger, 36, keeps her casual wardrobe reliable when visiting her fiancé’s family’s upstate New York farmhouse. Among her sensible staples: a **vintage Gap jean jacket**, breezy Zimmermann sundresses and Madewell jeans. She admits the bejeweled sandals she brought on a recent jaunt were impractical, and currently favors comfy flats like Birkenstocks. Other mainstays include her fragrant Coqui Coqui insect repellent and Ziploc accessory bags, ideal for costume jewelry.



Do It Better in Texas

If heading to a desert art mecca, follow Harsha L’Acqua’s lead and pack classic, slightly eccentric go-tos. As the founder of Saira Hospitality, the constantly traveling Ms. L’Acqua has earned packer status. For a recent trip to Marfa, Texas, Ms. L’Acqua, 38, relied on timeless accessories like a sun-shielding cowboy hat and **cream Converse high-tops**, which she elevated with long dresses and bright caftans. Too frivolous for the desert town? The multiple bikinis Ms. L’Acqua impulsively brought. Meanwhile, a printed kimono, which “might seem luxurious,” proved practical, doubling as an elegant morning dressing gown and a chic evening layering piece.



Conquer a Roman Holiday

For Mediterranean getaways, Tina Chen Craig finds easy dresses, buoyant skirts and versatile bathing suits most useful. On a recent trip to Rome and the island of Ischia, the Dallas-based U Beauty founder, who is in her 50s, adopted a care-free fashion approach. “I didn’t stress about looking cute, I was just so psyched to be leaving the country.” Ms. Craig toured landmarks in a fuss-free uniform of mid-length sundresses and Hermès’s Oasis sandals. A denim jacket proved too bulky for the hot Mediterranean, but Ms. Craig saved suitcase space by packing **one-piece swimsuits by Tropic of C** that pulled double-duty as bodysuits with skirts and linen trousers.



Turn Out in the Tropics

According to Jessica Nabongo, the Caribbean calls for statement swimsuits, lurid prints and wrinkle-resistant wares. A tireless Detroit travel writer who bills herself as the first Black woman to visit every country, she’s an admitted over-packer—a habit she manages with Flight 001’s packing cubes. For a recent trip to Anguilla, Ms. Nabongo, 37, filled them with vibrant, low-maintenance options, like an **airy jumpsuit by Diarrablu**. Her one regret: a tiered maxi dress, entirely too heavy for the steamy weather. More reliable fare included an Andrea Iyama bikini, Havaianas flip-flops and white Miu Miu sandals.