



TECHNOLOGY

Five must-have travel gadgets

By SIMON TSANG - SMH Last updated 11:09 24/11/2009

In a way, gadgets and travel go hand-in-hand. After all, you can bet it wasn't a stay-at-home lounge lizard who came up with the idea of the Walkman or iPod.

And today you'd be hard-pressed to find a traveller who didn't have some form of portable tech gadget tucked into a pocket, handbag or backpack.

Digital cameras, mobile phones and portable music players are not only becoming more compact, they're being crammed with more functions than a wedding hall.

Digital cameras now have the ability to detect not only faces but when people are smiling (I'm not making this up), while reducing the effects of shaky hands and recording the GPS co-ordinates of where the photo was taken.

Mobile phones have doubled as digital cameras and music players for years but recent developments have turned them into handy GPS navigation tools as well. No mention how mobile broadband via the 3G network has opened up internet use when we're out and about.

So, in tribute to these modern marvels of miniaturisation, we've come up with top travel gadgets that will entertain, delight and possibly even surprise you.

iPhone 3G S

Few phone companies have so successfully combined the features of a music and video player with the functionality of a mobile phone. Love it or hate it, it's not difficult to see the iPhone's appeal.

Its large 8.9-centimetre touch-screen is perfect for watching videos on the go and enables intuitive browsing of your music by flicking through an album's cover art.

Without a keypad, the iPhone's interface relies entirely on finger taps on the screen and, uniquely, two-finger strokes. Its onscreen keyboard is perhaps its weakest link with some complaining about not being able to type accurately or quickly.

Its capacity is also limited to 16 gigabytes or 32 gigabytes, depending on the model you choose, and there's no extra slot to expand the memory.

Those used to housing their entire music collection in a 60-gigabyte iPod will have to learn quickly about creating an iPhone playlist. The iPhone 3G S is, at its core, a data device built for pulling down information from the web through a 3G mobile network.

Hence, the price varies depending on the data plan you buy it on but most lock you into a two-year contract. For browsing the web on a mobile, it's about as good as they come - again, relying on fancy multi-touch gestures for navigation.

It's also equipped with Wi-Fi, so wherever a wireless internet hotspot is available, you can use the faster (and usually much cheaper) connection instead of the mobile network.

The Wi-Fi is so simple to use, it's a great tool for sniffing out wireless hotspots while travelling.

All said and done, the iPhone's biggest strength is its access to an extensive collection of software applications through the App Store. This means the iPhone has the ability to be much more than just a media player and mobile phone.

Its built-in GPS, for example, enables it to be used with Google Maps as a handy guide for finding a restaurant or pub within easy reach.

Bose QuietComfort 3 noise-cancelling headphones

There are times - especially when you're travelling - when you just want to shut the world out and quietly gather your thoughts. That's where noise-cancelling headphones come in.

Built for travel or commuting, models such as the Bose QuietComfort 3 can make you feel as if you're the only passenger on board, whether it's a plane, train or automobile.

Smart circuitry built into the headphones monitors the noise reaching your ears and cancels it out with its own noise - like fighting fire with fire.

It comes with a pair of rechargeable batteries, so you can swap and go on long-haul flights, and an adaptor lets you use it with the in-flight entertainment system. The QC3 also folds flat and comes with a travel carry case.

Montague folding bikes

Where most folding bicycles have small wheels and complex mechanisms, the Montague design is so simple and obvious, you wonder why no one has thought of it before.

What's more, all the models have full-size 26-inch mountain bike wheels, so you don't feel as if you're riding on roller skates. The Montague's frame swivels at the seat post after a quick-release lever is unlocked.

Pop off the front wheel, fold the rear stays around and it's ready to go into a car boot. It comes with a carry bag. A sister brand called SwissBike, based on the same design, is also available. Next year, a single-speed model called Boston (pictured) will be released.

3G USB modem

You don't always have access to a wireless hotspot or internet cafe when you need one. If you find yourself on the road a lot, a 3G USB modem is one of those devices you'll wonder how you ever did without. Just plug it into a spare USB port on your notebook and you have a reasonably fast broadband connection via the 3G mobile network.

The 3G USB modems are available from Vodafone and Telecom.

Jabra BT530 USB Bluetooth headset

Not only will the BT530 let you talk hands-free and cord-free on your mobile but it also can be connected simultaneously to your PC. You don't even need Bluetooth built into your computer.

With its own Bluetooth USB adaptor, you can use the headset for making calls or video-conferencing with programs such as Skype on any computer. It features noise-cancelling technology to remove background sounds.