

First, I admit there are occasions when dragging along and checking heavy bags may be necessary. Long overseas journeys, cruises, group excursions, and if you're a spoiled rotten rich family or entertainment celebrity with way too much money and stacks of clothing. But even many of those trips don't always require schlepping and checking weighty luggage. Especially now that airlines are charging \$50 and more for the service.

My spouse and I retired nearly 20 years ago, and since then we've flown a hundred times throughout the world, sailed on 20 or more cruises and joined dozens of group excursions. We've also traveled several times independently throughout Europe, Canada and the US by train, taxi, bus, often for three weeks or more. Soon we'll be on our way again, this time for a two-week journey to several US destinations. Once again, all our gear will be in carry-ons. Would you believe, except during the first retirement year when we were travel-clueless, we've never, ever checked our bags. After our first experience with disappeared checked-in bags, we made our commitment to carry-ons for all future trips.



Although the most important benefit of carry-ons is that we've never lost any, but there are other advantages. We've never had to wait at airport merry-go-rounds for hours after each flight hoping nothing was missing, and then be saddled with the bothersome need to file a claim and waiting for the lost luggage to show up... eventually. Today's average of lost and pilfered check-in bags is from 5 to 12% of every flight, depending on airports and nations involved. At holiday time, the average goes way, way up.

Here are our tried and true carry-on travel bag rules:

1. Get a wheeled bag made of flexible fabrics (not leather) up to the permitted airline size limit for carry-ons. Be sure it has outside, zipper-closing pockets for quick access to documents, as well as large see-through webbing pockets on the inside lid for items you use frequently. Take along another bag that is small enough to go under your airline seat, preferably a back-pack with over-the-shoulder straps. These two should take care of all your needs for up to a three-week journey, providing you don't expect to attend any dress-up events or have a formal audience with European or Papal royalty.

2. The day before departure, lay out the clothing, footwear, toiletries and other stuff you feel is absolutely necessary. Put it in nice neat piles. Then go through and take away at least 25%. Leave behind at least a quarter of the stack at home. We guarantee you won't regret it, and the truly necessary stuff should fit nicely into your carry-on bags. If you've mistakenly left out any vital items, such as over-the-counter medicines, you can always buy them at airport shops, hotels and elsewhere.

4. For trips of longer than two or three nights, stash your bags with as many washable items as possible, including wash-and-wear outerwear. Then, every night in the hotel or aboard your cruise ship take soiled items into the shower with you. Wring them out, get rid of excess water with your bath towel and let the clothing hang all night as near to the room heat source as is safe.

5. One of our favorite tricks is to take along worn-out clothing. Underwear, shirts, socks, shoes, light coats and other items that have given years of faithful service. Our family joke is that they deserve to go on a last one-way vacation with us. We wear them once on the trip, then put them in the trash or wash and fold them neatly if we think hotel help may want them. After you've rid yourselves of the old stuff, you'll have a much lighter load on your homeward trip, or more room in your bags for those souvenir doodads you want to take back with you.

Follow these simple rules, and you'll make your travels easier and less stressful.