

A Plus Buyer's Guide: Luggage

Whether we're watching the rain lash the tarmac at Heathrow or waiting for the departure screen at JFK to tell us when we're going home, we carry things wherever we go. The heart is the vessel for dreams and memories, but to transport the physical stuff of our lives while we travel, we need luggage. But just as travel is seldom about just getting from point A to point B, luggage is not about just putting things in a plastic box with a handle. It's about the intersection of practicality and beauty, of place and space. It's the feeling of familiarity that lets us sleep a little easier under new skies when we're far from home. It's about the objects of affection that resonate and grow with us, as we journey through the world. This guide will help you navigate the tools you'll need for your journey.

Trunks are reminders of the golden age of travel, of leisurely tea on the Orient Express from Paris, of urgent kisses on the platform. Made for extended trips, they are the Grande Dames of luggage: stately, reserved, and as full of stories as they are of sweaters and souvenirs. The most famous are those made by Louis Vuitton, who all but reinvented the trunk with the novel idea of making them flat-topped and stackable. The largest are often like small combination closet-dressers, but whatever you decide on, choose one that is airtight with sturdy hardware and it'll last many lifetimes. With a good trunk in the hold, you won't worry about your belongings whether at sea or in a window seat on a red-eye out of London.

Suitcases are the bread and butter of luggage. These are the strongholds from which you'll draw your still-cold shirt when you arrive in L.A. from Boston in December or that will keep a couple of extra bottles of that crisp, fragrant Bordeaux you found in Paris and "forgot" to declare. But it's not just about security. A well-crafted case will draw unexpected compliments and maybe a little envy while safekeeping your pajamas. Scratch and dent-resistant carbon fiber and new composites set the standard for stylish protection, while rich, supple hides and patterned or monogrammed canvas round out the more elegant and fashionable design offerings. On a leather or canvas suitcase, strong, even stitching, durable handles, and a good lining are essential. On hard shell cases, look for tough, light body construction and solid locks. Find one with wheels and a strap or handle...and make sure there's enough room for that Bordeaux.

For generations, the hard leather **briefcase** has been a symbol of professionalism: it's the accessory for anyone in business. A monogrammed hard leather briefcase is the perfect present for an executive friend. Cowhide, pigskin, goat, lambskin and even buffalo and ostrich--perhaps a bit too much for the starched shirts at the office--either form a case which is lined with fabric or, alternately, are stretched over a frame and double or triple stitched. Rolling combination latch/key locks keep your documents and belongings secure: they should be firmly attached and open and close smoothly. The hinge of the case should be a long, single piece and the internal compartments should not be peeling

free of the interior. Check for at least two lines of stitching and examine any zippers or snaps: you don't want anything rolling around as you make your way to the next board meeting. A more casual version is the soft leather briefcase. These are usually multi-compartmental and zippered. These often have a detachable shoulder strap and, unlike the unyielding hard leather briefcase, can be crammed quite full. Recognizing this tendency, many manufacturers now have expandable variations where accordion-like construction allows the case to make room for handouts, papers, or a stack of magazines picked up before boarding. Flaps that fold over the top of the case are a nice touch and will help protect the case from wear and tear to the zipper. As with the hard versions, the external surfaces should be wiped down occasionally with a damp cloth and treated with leather conditioner. For those who need something a little lighter, soft briefcases are also available in synthetic fabrics with the same features as the leather versions.

No one wants to run through an airport terminal dragging an anchor, especially for a short jaunt. That's why wheeled or rolling luggage is such a necessity for both the seasoned and the casual traveler. Made to fit perfectly in the overhead compartment on most planes, these stalwart companions are ideal for anyone who needs to get on the next plane to Denver or Dublin without checking a full-sized suitcase. Plenty of options are available: whether water-resistant nylon or resilient polycarbonate, these bags will keep you in motion. A light, sleekly-styled wheeled case with enough room for an unexpected pair of shoes or special memento from Miami or Milan is an investment in the endless possibilities that come with every trip. Look for a well-balanced model with an adjustable-height telescoping handle and you'll traverse the maze of the airport and the madness of the metro with equal dexterity and aplomb.

Duffels are the essence of ease when it comes to travel. These are often best for casual clothes that look better after wrinkling. They're descended from the sea-bags that sailors kept below deck, taking their name from the Belgian town of Duffel, where the heavy wool cloth that was used to make these soft cylinders was woven. Nowadays, you'll find them in nylon, canvas, and butter-smooth leather with gleaming brass or steel hardware. The handles should be fastened securely to the body of the bag and a detachable shoulder strap is a must, keeping your hands free for one last text message from the gate before take-off. Bon voyage!

Backpacks, like duffels, also have a military heritage. They range from internal frame--usually aluminum--supported packs made for extended hikes, camping, or trips. Many of these can fit in the overhead compartment on airplanes, but larger packs have to be checked. On the opposite end of the spectrum are simple drawstring bags often seen at outdoor music festivals or on school campuses, and are usually made of nylon, though leather versions are available. Most backpacks, however, are made of water-resistant nylon and consist of one main storage area, often with a compartment for a laptop and two or three smaller areas for chargers, pens, medications or books. Mesh bottle holders are common, and multiple d-rings, clips and locking straps enable the wearer to attach

additional tools. Mid-sized backpacks easily fit beneath an airline seat. Padded shoulder straps are a must on backpacks, as are adjustable waist straps to help stabilize heavier loads. Zippers are invariably the closure of choice on all but the drawstring type and should be of sound construction: check for fraying fabric around the zipper teeth. A backpack is intended to be light and durable and the frames, whether internal or external, shouldn't cause you any discomfort. Backpacks are an excellent choice for the casual traveler touring Europe or a couple having a picnic in the park.