

Travelling is now a complete lifestyle, compared to how it used to be. No longer do people head to the local travel agent, book a two-week break in a resort and head off for the sun. Well, people still do that but that's a holiday. Travelling is a completely different beast altogether. Travelling needs change often and once you thought you needed to pack three suitcases and a carry-on the savvy traveller now knows that you can get away with taking the carry-on only.

Not only has travelling changed, the luggage has also and no longer do you need to lug around a heavy wheeled carry-on suitcase and drag it behind you wherever you are. A carry-on backpack is lighter, more compact and gives you more freedom to travel the globe. Whether it's a tourist trap or off the beaten path, a carry-on backpack is definitely the way to go for the modern traveller.

Factors To Consider When Choosing The Right Carry-On Backpack

Taking a carry-on backpack travelling with you may be liberating but how do you know which one is the right one for you. There are plenty of backpacks to choose from and while the destination might be an easy pick, the luggage might not be.

There are ways to narrow down the choice though and certain factors to consider when buying your carry-on backpack.

Those factors are

1. Capacity
2. Weight
3. Organisation
4. Compression

Factor One: Capacity

When it comes to a carry-on backpack, capacity is key but not for the reasons you might think. A larger capacity is not necessarily a better thing. What you want is a decent capacity in a smaller backpack. This is better for a few different reasons. A smaller backpack with a decent capacity means you know you're guaranteed to get it through those airline requirements for size and onto the plane. It also means you won't over pack, minimising what you take and making sure you utilise the space to its full potential.

Factor Two: Weight

A lighter backpack is a better backpack when it comes to the carry-on. If you're a seasoned traveller you know how much you can carry and do so comfortably. A lightweight backpack is going to aid with how much you can pack and how much you can carry. It's also going to help when getting onto the plane with the weight restrictions. If you're going on a long trip too, a lighter backpack is going to be more comfortable over a long time.

Factor Three: Organisation

If you're only taking a carry-on backpack with you then a bag with a lot of pockets and good organisation is important. You need to have a place for everything you'll need and you don't want to be rummaging through all your clothes at the airport for your passport and tickets. If you have a carry-on as well as some other luggage it's still going to be beneficial to have an organised backpack. If you're on a long-haul flight there isn't a lot of room to be rifling through your flight supplies for your book or mp3 player or your snacks. You'll only end up elbowing your neighbour and getting flustered when you should be relaxing.

Factor Four: Size

The ideal carry-on is no good if it doesn't meet the requirements of the airline. The smaller the bag the more likely you are to get it on the plane and under the seat. But that could come at the cost of some capacity. If you know what airlines you're more likely to frequent, that can give you a good idea of the size of backpack you need. Or find the most restrictive airline and go for a backpack that fits that but still offers you enough capacity.

The Top Ten Carry-On Backpacks

1. Osprey Porter 30
2. Kelty Redwing 44 Backpack
3. Arcido Faroe Backpack
4. Cladpigeon Travel Backpack
5. The North Face Unisex Surge
6. eBags TLS Mother Lode Weekender Convertible
7. Cabin Max Metz Backpack
8. Hynes Eagle 40L Backpack
9. Tortuga Air Backpack
10. Timbuk2 Uptown Travel Backpack

1. Osprey Porter 30

The Osprey Porter 30 is a tough little backpack that will fit into an overhead or under your seat, and give you easy access to everything you need on the go.

Feature #1: Organisation

With a thirty litre capacity, there is plenty of space for everything you need to have with on the plane and then some. The main pocket opens at the front, the flap folding down to give you full access to the interior for packing. This opening is a pocket in itself, one that holds a

laptop – complete with strap and buckle to hold it in place – pockets for your phone and other small items such as your tickets and passports. There is a pocket at the top of the bag that will hold small items too.

Feature #2: Durable

The Porter30 is made with a 420 denier nylon material so it will stand up to being knocked around a busy airport or shoved into the overhead locker. The zippers are tough metal teeth with plastic tabs attached with a cord so they're easier to pull and will last longer. Cord tends to last longer than the plastic zip tab alone would.

Feature #3: Comfortable

The shoulder straps are padded and lined with a mesh material to improve ventilation, keeping you cooler and more comfortable. The waist strap is padded too and wide, sitting snug on your hips and adjustable to make sure the entire bag sits properly on your back. The compression system is a 'straight jacket' that is pulled around the whole bag to pull the contents together, making sure they're secure and balanced as you carry the bag. The sternum strap also means the bag is kept close to your body and stabilises the load further.

Real Users Feedback

4.7 out of five stars over 117 reviews, owners find this backpack a great improvement on the previous model and love the way the straps can be tucked away. A drawback seems to be the lack of side pockets.

Pros

- Organisation
- Lockable zips

Cons

- No side pockets for water bottles

2. Kelty Redwing 44 Backpack

The Kelty Redwing is both a top loading and panel loading backpack, giving you the choice to pack however you need to fit in those 44 litres of capacity.

Feature #1: Capacity

The Redwing has a 44-litre capacity overall, so you've got enough room in there to pack what you need for those longer trips. The main compartment offers top loading as well as panel loading, opening up fully so you can pack everything in and make the most of the space. There is a large front pocket, and two large zippered pockets at the top of each side of the bag that can be packed to capacity and still meet those carry-on requirements. Beneath the side zippered pockets are two mesh pockets for water bottles and similar items.

Feature #2: Comfort

The backpack offers a comfortable carry for as long as you need it. The waist belt has a dual density foam interior and the back panel is padded for increased lumbar support. There are a couple of features to help you keep cool too; the standard mesh layer over the straps and back offers ventilation and there is dynamic airflow in the back panel. To balance the load as you carry, there is a sternum belt and load lifting straps on the waist belt and shoulder straps.

Feature #3: Organisation

Both the main pocket and front pockets offer a good measure of organisation. The main compartment has a sleeve for books and flatter items. The front pocket has several different pockets inside it – so you can sort your tickets, passport and anything you need to have to hand in there and know exactly where it is. The side pockets mean there is a place for everything you need.

Real Users Feedback

4.7 out of five stars over 196 reviews, this bag is a practical buy, edging out the larger version of it and getting through those strict airline requirements even when full to the brim. Complaints seem to be that it's a little big for those with shorter frames.

Pros

- Comfy
- Sturdy

Cons

- No padded laptop sleeve.
- No way to lock zippers.

3. Arcido Faroe Backpack

The Faroe is a stylish backpack that is made for flying – with document pockets, a laptop sleeve that makes it easy to remove at security and plenty of room for your stuff.

Feature #1: Slimline

Arcido has taken out a lot of the extra padding in this bag, keeping it slim and under the measurements for even the strictest of airline carry-on requirements. The slim size doesn't mean a loss of capacity though; the Arcido still has more than enough room for days worth of clothes and gear, all fitting nicely in the main compartment.

Feature #2: Pockets

The Arcido has plenty of pockets so you have a place for everything. The main compartment opens fully, lying flat to give you complete access to everything you pack. The front pocket is organised into different pockets and a laptop sleeve. There is a dedicated pocket in the back

of the bag for important documents and your passport, at the top of the bag at the front there is a small pocket for keys and small items.

Feature #3: Adjustable Laptop Sleeve

A neat little feature of the bag is the laptop sleeve. Padded to protect it, it is also adjusted to fit the exact size of your laptop. This offers a more secure fit and stops it from moving around in the bag so you're more comfortable too. Removing the laptop at airport security is easy too with a pull tab that means it's ready for inspection easily and quickly, saving you time and effort. Perfect for travellers.

Real Users Feedback

Five out of five stars over three reviews, this backpack is loved for being lightweight and practical, making everything completely accessible. It's a versatile bag if a little long.

Pros

- Water-resistant
- Slim

Cons

- Not enough reviews to be sure of quality

4. Cladpigeon Travel Backpack

The Cladpigeon is a sleek backpack that has been built with the opinions and advice of travellers and backpack enthusiasts and to make it the best carry-on backpack it can be.

Feature #1: Convertible Carry

The Cladpigeon is a convertible backpack and carry-on. The shoulder straps and hip belt can be hidden away in a special pocket of their own – not taking up any room from the capacity of the bag – so that it can be carried by hand. The two handles on the side and the top mean you can grab it and go if you don't need to settle it on your back and just need to grab it off the plane and drop it on the seat of the cab you catching at the airport. The shoulder straps and hip belt are well padded so when you're ready to move, you can wear it comfortably for a good amount of time.

Feature #2: Security

There a few security features on this backpack which make it great for travelling around. There are dual layer zippers on the bag to stop people from just breaking the zips open when you've locked them together. The laptop sleeve is located at the back of the bag, so your laptop is against your back and much harder to get at when you're wearing the bag. The zips are all lockable and the interior has space for small items you need to keep safe such as your passport.

Feature#3: Pockets

The main compartment of the bag is 17 litres which doesn't sound like a lot, but that doesn't take into account all the other pockets and the laptop sleeve. The sleeve holds a laptop up to 17 inches so the bigger end of the scale and the main compartment has two zippered pockets for valuables that can be locked if needed. The front pockets are divided into several small pockets so there is a place for everything you need to take with you on your trip.

Real Users Feedback

3.4 out of five stars over ten reviews, owners have loved this backpack enough to buy a second for a friend and recommend them to others. Some have found it a little small on capacity and lacking a few features still.

Pros

- Durable
- Secure

Cons

- Not enough to be sure of quality
- Heavy and bulky

5. The North Face Unisex Surge

This backpack from the well known North Face brand offers is tough and practical, small but not lacking in space in any way.

Feature #1: Durable

The Surge is made with a mix of 500 denier Cordura material and a 600 denier nylon material that is tough and long-lasting, and won't just wear out after a couple of uses. This material is tear-resistant and water-resistant, providing you with a good measure of protection in a light rain and against bumps and knocks when you're making your way through those busy airports.

Feature #2: Comfortable

There is a comfortable and cool carry for however long you need it. The shoulder straps are injection moulded with a mesh lining to increase ventilation. The back panel has a padded mesh spine channel and lumbar support so reduce as much pressure as possible. There is a sternum strap to secure the entire bag to your body and the

Feature #3: Padded Laptop Sleeve

The surge is perfect for those travellers carrying expensive and delicate electronics with them. The laptop sleeve holds a laptop up to 15 inches and it both padded and fleece lined. This extra layer helps keep it safe and secure and prevents scratching. There are several other pockets with the fleece lining too, so you can store your tablet, phone and iPod safely and without them being scratched.

Real Users Feedback

4.7 out of five stars over 156 reviews, owners of the bag find it sturdy and fits the 15 inches laptop as promised, the side pockets hold up well and the contents do not ride up. It is, however, heavy due to all the extra padding for those electronics.

Pros

- Durable
- Well-Known Brand

Cons

- Heavy
- Extra padding reduces the overall capacity.

6. eBags TLS Mother Lode Backpack

The eBags Mother Lode is a convertible backpack boasting plenty of capacity when you need it, and a junior version for your travelling kids.

Feature #1: Expandable Capacity

The Motherlode lives up to its name with full expansion zippers that add up to ten percent extra space when you need it. The total capacity when filled to the brim is around sixty litres, more than enough for any traveller and still, meets those strict airline requirements. There are four compression straps around the bag and two inside the main compartment to secure everything you pack so that if you under pack your gear doesn't just slosh around in the main compartment of the bag. This is great for bringing back presents from your travels.

Feature #2: Organisation

The main compartment of the back can be converted into two halves for organising your clothes or keeping your clothes separate from your shoes. The separator simply clips into place easily to suit your needs. There is zippered mesh pocket in the main compartment too for more items. The laptop pocket is at the back of the bag, so it sits against your back and is hard to get to when you're carrying the backpack. The front pocket has several zippered pockets for small items such as your phone and passport and there is a top pocket big enough for a water bottle if needed.

Feature #3: Convertible Carry-On

Another convertible back, the eBags Motherlode offers three ways to carry their bag so you aren't stuck trying to get through the airport while holding it in your hand or wrestling it off your back and into the overhead compartment. The shoulder straps can be tucked away so you can carry it like a regular suitcase, and it comes with a strap to be clipped in place giving you the option to carry the bag like a duffel. This means you only need one bag for whatever type of trip you go on.

Real Users Feedback

4.7 out of five stars over 695 reviews, this bag has plenty of people gushing over its versatility. Owners says the shoulder straps are comfortable but the lack of a properly padded hip belt means it can't be carried for too long if filled to capacity.

Pros

- Large capacity
- Durable

Cons

- Bulky
- Hip belt isn't padded
- No side pockets for water bottles.

7.Cabin Max Metz Backpack

The Metz comes in a variety of colours and designs so there's something for everyone and with a 44-litre capacity there is room for everyone too.

Feature #1: Lightweight

The Metz weighs almost nothing in comparison to other bags on the list at 1lb 6oz. This is perfect for those with heavier gear to take with them. If you've a heavier laptop or a have a lot of heavy clothes or shoes, or even books for a long flight then you're not adding too much to the overall weight you're carrying with this bag. It also reduces the amount of weight you feel like you're carrying if you've got the bag on you back for a long time.

Feature#2: Capacity

The Metz capacity is 44 litres overall, so enough room for everything you need for a couple weeks, or even longer if you're a good packer or a minimalist traveller. The main compartment opens up fully so you have full access for packing and unpacking to make the most of the available space. Fully loaded this bag still meets the strict requirements of airlines such as Ryanair and Emirates.

Feature #3: Durable

Made with a 600 denier material the backpack is tough and offers a good amount of protection for your gear when you're pushing the bag into the overhead compartment or it's sitting under your seat on the plane. This material is also shower proof, so you've got time if the rain starts to find some shelter without your contents being thoroughly soaked.

Real Users Feedback

4.2 out of five stars over 526 reviews, owners find this bag good value for the capacity, and although shaped a bit like a brick when full, it's good for those weekend trips and the shaped straps help make it more comfortable to carry. However many find there are some key features missing.

Pros

- Inexpensive
- Good capacity

Cons

- No laptop sleeve
- No sternum or waist straps.

8. Hynes Eagle 40L Backpack

The Hynes Eagle backpack is a practical forty litre capacity backpack that can fit in the overhead compartment or under the seat and has multiple compartments for everything you need, lockable zips and a solid sternum strap.

Feature #1: Convertible Carrying

The Haynes Eagle has two sturdy handles on the top of the bag so it can be carried like a suitcase, and lifted properly from under your seat or out of the trunk of the car. The shoulder straps can be tucked away for safe storage and to stop them from getting caught on anything as you move through security and place in the overhead. The shoulder straps are padded and comfortable for long term carrying.

Feature#2: Capacity

This backpack features a forty litre capacity, which is a good amount for a backpack still meeting the carry-on requirements. It has a main compartment with internal straps to hold everything in place, the external compression straps help prevent your gear from shifting around in the back if you've left room in the back.

Feature#3: Pockets

There is a main compartment for your clothes, and then the second pocket in front of that has both a laptop sleeve and space for a tablet or something of similar size. These are held in place with a strap and Velcro to stop them from falling out or moving around too much so they're secure as you travel. The laptop sleeve fits a laptop 15 inches. The front pockets zip off to reveal several small pockets for your passport or wallet and other small items you need to access. Unlike some other carry-on backpacks, this has a side pocket for a water bottle too.

Real Users Feedback

4.4 out of five stars over 97 reviews, owners of the bag say this is well made, with strong straps and handles but many have had some trouble with the buckles snapping and the bag needs to be a little taller and thinner.

Pros

- Water-resistant
- Large Capacity
- Inexpensive

Cons

- Poor quality buckles
- Bulky

9. Tortuga Air Travel Backpack

The Tortuga Air has a smaller capacity than some of the bags on the list but don't let that fool you, you can fit plenty in and carry it all comfortably.

Feature #1: Expandable Capacity

The bag has a 27-litre capacity and is designed for shorter trips, rather than long holidays, or the minimalist packer. The main compartment has straps to hold down your gear to stop it from rolling around and there is a mesh zippered pocket for toiletries or dirty clothes. The bag then expands to 35 litres to fit in more gear if needed, so you can get a few more clothes in for a few more days, or if you want to bring him a lot of souvenirs.

Feature #2: Lightweight

The Tortuga air weight 2lbs 4oz when empty, so if you know how much you can personally carry, you only have to factor in a low weight to that maximum. This is good for heavy items, and packing in all the gear you can. Laptops can be heavy too, but not so much in the Air. Nice for those times when you'll have to carry the bag for longer stretches of time.

Feature #3: Comfortable

The lightweight feature of this backpack really helps when it comes to being a comfortable carry. Rather than being heavy or cumbersome, the Tortuga Air is easy to slip on and carry. The bag has padded shoulder straps and a sternum strap that balances the weight well and reducing the strain on your shoulders. The back is padded in several places to reduce the pressure of the bag on the back. The padding is covered in a mesh material too to improve ventilation and keep you cool.

Real Users Feedback

4.6 out of five stars over thirty reviews, owners find the bag sturdy and compact, without losing too much on space, made of a tough material with solid zippers that are lockable

Pros

- Light
- Opens fully

Cons

- Small laptop compartment
- No hip belt

10. Timbuk2 Uptown Travel Backpack

The Uptown backpack is made for air travel with several features that show it can do more than just get you from place to place.

Feature #1: TSA Ready Laptop Sleeve

The Uptown backpack has a dedicated laptop sleeve, that is padded and made specifically to get you through airport security quickly and without the hassle of messing around in your backpack getting the laptop out. It has a side opening and a Velcro closure strap to hold it in place and opens fully to lie flat. This means you can just slide the laptop out and then back in again when you're done.

Feature #2: Comfort

The shoulder straps are curved to match the shape of your body and padded to reduce the pressure of the bag pulling down. The bag had channelled air mesh ventilated back panel so you're cooler and it's padded on both sides of this channel to improve the comfort of the carry on your back. The straps are adjustable and non-yoke so you can get an even better fit than ever.

Feature #3: Organisation

Along with the laptop sleeve and a pocket for your iPad on one section, the main compartment is large enough for all your bigger gear and clothes, with a front pocket for those smaller items that need to be together and organised. There are pockets for your passport and tickets, top pockets for sunglasses and keys, and a large side pocket for a water bottle. There is a place for everything in the Uptown.

Real Users Feedback

4.5 out of five stars over 81 reviews, owners like all the small pockets around the bag and that TSA-friendly laptop sleeve feature, but many find the bottle opener unnecessary and unprofessional, and there is very little compression.

Pros

- Easy access laptop sleeve
- Compact

Cons

- Not much compression
- Zips aren't lockable

Final Verdict For The Best Carry-On Backpack

Those are the top ten carry-on backpacks, but there's still a decision to be made. But which one is the best for you? If you know what you need the most, whether it be capacity or weight, then I can narrow it down further for you by looking at each of the factors and the bags that best fit them.

Factor One: Capacity

The eBags TSL Motherlode definitely has the most capacity, even before you factor in the expandable feature of the bag. That alone adds 10% extra capacity to the bag so you max out at sixty litres overall. The Kelty Redwing and the Cabin Max Metz backpacks offer forty-four litres, with the Cabin Max being more compact but the Kelty the more durable bag.

Factor Two: Weight

The lightest bag is easily the Cabin Max Metz backpack. At 1.6 pounds there aren't a lot of other bags out there will be that light but still, offer forty-four litres of capacity without falling apart at the seams on the first day. The Arcido Faroe comes in a close second at only 1.9 pounds but still holding more than enough for what you need.

Factor Three: Organisation

The eBags Motherlode definitely offers the best organisation for your money. With a divider to separate the main compartment up and a zippered mesh pocket, you can sort your clothes however you need. With a front pocket delivered up into several pockets and a laptop compartment, it's got everything you need for a well-organised trip. The Kelty Redwing and the Timbuk2 Uptown also offer a good level of organisation with extra side pockets on Redwing.

Factor Four: Size

The Cabin Metz is one of the smallest bags of the lot, with that low weight it's surprising how much you can fit into it and still get it under your airline seat. Some of the stricter carry-on limits are quite low and this bag, as well as the Tortuga Air, meet most of them, but it's always good to check, especially with some of the budget airlines.

Final Choice For The Best Carry-On Backpack

My choice for the best carry-on backpack is definitely the eBags Motherlode Weekender back. While it doesn't have a padded hip belt, it does have a waist strap and sternum strap to help balance that load properly. The shoulder straps and back are padded and covered in mesh for ventilation so it's a comfortable carry as you head through the airports. Plus with three ways to carry it, it's easy to transport from plane to train to automobile.

That expandable capacity is a key feature you can't ignore if you travel light but buy big when you're out there. Or if you've an unexpected need for another ten percent of space. Knowing you've got a little breathing room with your luggage will help your packing a lot and it opens up fully like a regular suitcase.

The Motherlode has the organisation to make your trip easier too. No carry-on backpack is worth its salt without a laptop sleeve and this one holds one up to 15 inches at least. The pockets in the front compartment mean you can access your tickets and passport easily and quickly. The interior material is orange to aid with visibility no matter where you are and there are two small pockets at the top inside and outside for small valuables and other items.

You don't need much more and it'll see you on the plane and away for longer than just a weekend.