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# How To Get Around Paying For Your Baggage

by TFB EDITORS on JUNE 14, 2012

By Jan Ross

Remember how you used to pack whatever you wanted in your suitcases and take whatever you wanted on the plane? Not sure which outfit to bring? Oh, heck, bring them all – you might want some choices! They never weighed suitcases, you could take several, and it really didn't matter how big they were, how heavy they were, or how awkward – just leave them at the check-in area and forget about them. Every Baby Boomer remembers those good ol' days.

Anyone who has traveled recently, however, knows this is no longer the case. You are restricted on size and weight and, even with those restrictions, you still have to pay for your baggage if you're traveling domestically. If you're traveling with your family, this can get quite expensive. [A chart on Airfare Watchdog](#) lists all the charges.

Except: You don't always have to pay. Not always. There are ways to get around those expensive luggage charges. Following are my six favorite tips.

## 1. Carry-ons

I'm the first to admit that this will never work for me because I can't fit the shoes I want to take in a carry-on, much less the clothes I want to bring. Yes, I have read every article about how to take a week's worth of clothes in a carry-on (including [Kim's recent post](#)), but I just can't do it. I bet you can, however.

Honestly, for us, it's not so much the shoes (although I might possibly have a slight, tiny shoe addiction) but the fact that we have a camera in a bag, a laptop, a fan (yes, we sleep with a fan, she admits shamefully), and various other techie gizmos we really need in order to keep up with our travel writing and photography. Our carry-ons are full of all this stuff, so we really need the suitcases that we check.

But if you don't need to bring all this stuff, you might actually be able to carry everything on the plane. Most carriers allow you one bag and another item, such as a laptop bag or backpack, and you can pack a lot in those two items. Just be aware that you might have to check them at the gate on some of the smaller planes that, quite simply, don't have room in the overheads. So make sure you can easily get out your laptop or other fragile things you need to keep with you. You will get them back when you land. Just wait at the jetway when you get off the plane and they'll hand them back to you.

## 2. Credit cards

Most airlines and many banks offer some great credit card deals that come with free miles when you travel. If you don't have one, you should get one immediately. You don't even have to travel to get the miles: Just use the card for things you would be spending money on anyway and you can collect enough miles for a free flight without ever actually flying first.

Some of those cards also offer a variety of other benefits including no baggage charge when you do fly. The [Delta Skymiles American Express](#) card allows you to put your baggage on the plane absolutely free – and you don't even have to use the card to pay for your flight unless you want to get double miles. You just have to have the account and you automatically get your baggage on the plane for free. There is an annual fee for this card but, for us, it's easily offset by the baggage charges we save. There may be other



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cards that will work better for you, such as [United's MileagePlus Explorer card](#) that lets you and a companies check your first bag for free. Just do a little research.

### 3. Send your baggage ahead of you

It might sound wacky, but it just may cost less to send your baggage to your destination via FedEx, UPS, and the U.S. Postal Service instead of taking it on the plane. This is an especially a good idea if your baggage is particularly heavy because you can expect some extremely hefty charges at the airport if your baggage is overweight. Another big advantage is that you can insure your baggage with all these companies and, unlike the airlines, if they lose your baggage you will actually be reimbursed!



### 4. Fly airlines that don't charge for baggage

Aside from very small, local airlines, the only two national airlines that are still not charging for baggage are [JetBlue](#) and [Southwest](#). Unfortunately, they don't cover the entire United States, but if you're within a short drive to the airport where they have a hub, it might be worth the drive — if the gas to get there doesn't cost more than the checked baggage fee, that is!

### 5. See if you are exempt

Most airlines don't make their First Class passengers pay for checked bags. Some don't charge active members of the military, either. And if you have elite status with an airline, you probably won't be charged baggage fees. That's often one of the perks of gaining elite status.

### 6. And finally — go to Europe!

Or Asia. Or Africa. Etc. Point is: Your baggage is free on most international flights. **Except:** [United just announced that it will charge \\$100, instead of \\$70, for the second bag you check](#) (yikes!) on international flights, matching Delta's fee hike that was announced in January.



To read another TFB post on avoiding baggage fees and fuel surcharges, [click here](#).

**Do you have any additional tips for getting around baggage fees? If so, please share them in the Comments section.**

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