

Luggage That Suits

Buying luggage can be as nerve-racking as buying a car. Do you want a low-cost, stripped-down model that simply gets you from point A to point B, or do you need fancy features and shiny extras? A heavyweight that will stand up to any collision or something lighter that may dent easily? A lifetime warranty or no coverage once you “drive” it out of the store?

Options aside, your luggage purchase doesn't have to be stressful. Here are five ways to ensure your next suitcase suits you.

1. Think return on investment.

Do you want a suitcase that will get you through the next trip or last through the next decade? A good bag, like a good pair of shoes, is worth paying a bit more for. Take time to research brands and models. It's okay to “kick the tires” and carefully examine suitcases in a store. A good one should fit you and your travel style. Pull it around the store. How does it maneuver? Lift it up onto a table. Is it lighter or heavier than expected? Look for a manufacturer's guarantee of at least 5 to 10 years. If anything goes wrong—for example, an airline damages your bag or a zipper simply stops zipping—repair of the bag typically will be covered, free of charge.

2. Shed extra weight.

With airlines dinging passengers for checked bags (plus, charging extra for more than 50 pounds per bag), now's the time to dump old, heavy suitcases. Polycarbonate (hardside) luggage usually weighs the least, as little as four pounds, and will protect the contents. The downside of hardside: to minimize



weight, you sacrifice functionality (that means no extra handles or outside pockets). Basic models open like a clamshell with only a few interior straps to hold your belongings and no pockets for shoes or toiletries, and the cheap stuff may crack or easily scratch.

3. Size up the situation.

Confused by what size bag can be squeezed into overhead bins, whether you're flying to Athens, Georgia, or Athens, Greece? You aren't alone. Many manufacturers now label suitcases based on their ability to fit an airline's carry-on regulations, instead of on their dimensions. Look for terms such as “commuter,” “domestic,” “international” and “large.” For instance, “domestic” means the case should fit on flights within the U.S. Also consider “widebody” models. These wheeled bags still stay under the 45-inch maximum dimensions (height x width x depth) by shaving an inch or two off the height but adding space to the width. The result? A squarer suitcase that squeezes into most overhead bins and—eureka!—the bin door closes.

4. Don't fixate on flashy features.

What can and can't you live without? A waterproof zipper? An outside handle so that you have more packing capability? A telescoping, adjustable handle? Sure, four-wheels, often called “spinners,” make it easier to maneuver a suitcase with the option to push or pull, but they add both weight and sacrifice space. Do you really need a gazillion internal or external pockets? Weigh the pros and cons of every feature and extra.

5. If you belong to Overpackers Anonymous, don't despair.

Try luggage that can be “compressed.” Reducing bag size can mean the difference between meeting airline size requirements or paying extra fees. With an expandable suitcase, you pull up the sides of the case, pack it (up to 34 percent over capacity), zip it closed and compress it to its original size. One caveat: Just because compressible luggage works like “magic” to allow for more belongings, it doesn't magically make your stuff any lighter.

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