

Understanding Airline Baggage Restrictions

A breakdown of rules and fees and how they are — or are not — employed



By William Sawalich

Starting in 2007, airlines tried a new tactic in the price wars: a la carte fares. The resulting tickets were lower cost, but previously complimentary amenities like meals, movies and checked baggage were now subject to add-on fees.

Travelers responded by eschewing checked bags in favor of carry-ons. Still, the U.S. Department of Transportation reported domestic airlines earned more than \$3.5 billion in baggage fees in 2012, up 600% from 2007. Not included in that figure are fees for early boarding, which passengers pay as much to ensure overhead bin space as for desirable seating.

This tug-of-war presents an opportunity for luggage retailers. An understanding of the nuances of size and weight restrictions for carry-on and checked baggage — as well as how they

are employed — helps retailers save customers time, money and hassles.

RULES — AND RULES OF THUMB

Sadly, there's no such thing as a universal standard. Most domestic flights restrict carry-ons to less than 45 linear inches (length + width + height), often cited as 22"x14"x 9". These are overall dimensions, which include protrusions like wheels, handles and pockets. Some carriers allow a bit more, and some — especially regional commuter jets — permit less. For international carriers, word on the street dictates a smaller, 20-inch bag, but in fact the majority now mirror U.S. measurements.

Weight is not typically stipulated for domestic carry-ons, but a bag you cannot hoist overhead is likely to be checked. Some flight attendants won't lift bags for liability reasons, others won't to protect themselves from injury. Basically, if you can't lift it, check it. (International carriers are more likely to enforce carry-on weight limits. Some permit packaged duty-free items

above and beyond carry-ons and, unlike domestic U.S. carriers, they frequently permit larger garment bags.)

There's almost always a checked bag fee on domestic flights, which can't exceed 62 linear inches and 50 pounds. Breaking those barriers means additional, compounding fees. (It's important to note additional bag charges are typically less than those for overweight bags — two sub-50-lb. bags are less expensive than one 70-pounder.) First and Business Class tickets are often granted more liberal luggage size and weight restrictions, if not outright exemption from bag fees.

Outside of the U.S., carriers typically follow the Weight Concept for checked bags — which places no limits on quantity of checked baggage, only total weight. Flights to, from and within the U.S. adhere to the Piece Concept, which limits both weight and quantity of checked bags.

Exemptions to these rules abound, so savvy luggage retailers will consult airline websites while assisting customers.

Continued on page 53

Airline Baggage Restrictions and Fees

Although a handful of measurements are considered industry standard, baggage regulations actually vary from airline to airline for domestic and international flights. Here's a handy chart of current fees and restrictions that can be easily cut and copied for your customers' reference.

DOMESTIC BAGGAGE RESTRICTIONS AND FEES

All measurements in pounds, inches and U.S. Dollars unless otherwise indicated.

Airline	Carry-on Limits	Checked Bag Limits	First Checked Bag Fee	Overweight Fees	Oversize Fees	Notes
American	45", 22x14x9	62", 50 lbs.	\$25	\$100-\$200	\$200	Passengers without a carry-on may board early.
Delta	45", 22x14x9	62", 50 lbs.	\$25	\$100-\$200	\$200	Carry-on "must fit easily in the carry-on baggage check"
Hawaiian	45", 22x14x9, 25 lbs.	62", 50 lbs.	\$17-\$25	\$25-\$50	\$25-\$100	Inter-island fees are lower
JetBlue	24x16x10	62", 50 lbs.	Free	\$50-\$100	\$75	On Airbus A320, carry-on limit increases to 26x18x12
Southwest	24x16x10	62", 50 lbs.	Two Bags Free	\$75	\$75	
Spirit	22x18x10	62", 40 lbs.	\$20-\$100	\$25-\$100	\$100-\$150	All carry-on items are assessed fees from \$25 to \$100
United	45", 22x14x9	62", 50 lbs.	\$25	\$100-\$200	\$100	
US Airways	45", 22x14x9, 40 lbs.	62", 50 lbs.	\$25	\$90-\$175	\$175	

INTERNATIONAL BAGGAGE RESTRICTIONS AND FEES

All measurements in pounds, inches and U.S. Dollars unless otherwise indicated.

Airline	Carry-on Limits	Checked Bag Limits	First Checked Bag Fee	Overweight Fees	Oversize Fees	Notes
Aeromexico	22x14x9, 22 lbs.	62", 50 lbs.	Free	\$15 per Kg		
Air China	21x15x7, 11 lbs.	50 lbs.	Free	1.5% of fare, \$200+		Carry-on must fit under seat in front of you or in overhead bin. Will accept "extremely overweight" luggage for a fee.
Air France	22x14x10, 26.5 lbs.	62", 50 lbs.	Free	\$70+	\$300	Garment bags are permissible as carry-ons. Personal items count toward weight.
Avianca	45", 22 lbs.	62", 50 lbs.	Free	\$3 per Kg	\$50	
British Airways	22x18x10, 50 lbs.	35.5x29.5x16, 50 lbs.	Free	\$60		Carry-on "must fit into the baggage gauge."
Cathay Pacific	22x14x9, 15 lbs.	44 lbs.	Free	\$10+		Checked bag weight and size limits are 50 lbs. and 62" to USA
China Eastern	22x14x9, 15+ lbs.	62", 44 lbs.	Free	CNY 1,000+	CNY 1,000+	Checked bag weight limit is 70 lbs. to USA
KLM	21.5x10x13.5, 26 lbs.	62", 50.5 lbs.	Free	€70-€100+	€20+	Carry-on weight includes personal items.
Lufthansa	22x16x9, 17.6 lbs.	62", 50 lbs.	Free	\$70+	\$150+	Garment bags are permissible as carry-ons up to 22x21x6.
Qantas	45", 15 lbs.	54", 50 lbs.	Free	\$15 per Kg		Garment bags are permissible as carry-ons up to 73".
Ryanair	22x16x8, 22 lbs.	33 lbs.	€15-€25+	€20 per Kg		Strictly one carry-on per passenger. No allowance for personal item. Checked fees vary by season. Bags over 50 lbs. are not permitted.
Singapore Airlines	45", 15.5 lbs.	44 lbs.	Free	\$8-\$60 per Kg		Checked bag weight limit is 50 lbs.. to USA
Thai Airways	22x18x10, 15 lbs.	22 lbs.	Free	\$119		Checked bag weight and size limits are 50 lbs. and 62" to USA
Turkish Airlines	22x16x9, 18 lbs.	44 lbs.	Free	\$80-\$150		Checked bag weight and size limits are 50 lbs. and 62" to USA



Continued from page 51

“Customers are becoming more aware of size and weight restrictions,” says Kay Thayer, owner of Traveler’s Depot in San Diego. “The other day I had a woman come in who was not certain about the size allowed for a carry-on on a foreign airline. I offered to go to my computer to look it up, but she whipped out her smartphone and got the answer in an instant. She proceeded to purchase a bag confident that it would be allowed.”

HOW RULES ARE APPLIED

There are special rules for flights to, from and within the United States. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Transportation declared that airlines must specify all baggage charges when a fare is quoted, instituting IATA (International Air Transport Association) Resolution 302 — the Most Significant Carrier (MSC) rule. It stipulates that the fees and restrictions of the marketing airline, the one named on the ticket, will apply for the duration of the trip, even across subsequent legs on different carriers, both outbound and in.

That’s the theory, anyway. The reality is there’s spotty enforcement of baggage rules. Airlines are motivated to be strict — more fees amount to more profit, after all. But frequent travelers say they’re regularly permitted flexibility. Videographer Ted Fouke says that after 120 flights with an oversize carry-on, only once was he asked to check the bag. “If you’re cool about it and nice about it,” he says, “they’re helpful. That’s across airlines. In fact, they usually let me board early, with group one, when I tell them I’m a cameraman and my bag has all my gear in it.”

Cycling writer Alan Cote travels with a large checked case that’s two inches too long, but it’s not an issue. “It has never caused trouble for me,” he says. “My sense is that the people who check it kind of eyeball a piece of luggage. They’re not going to measure every bag, it would take them all day. I think they just red flag the ones that are obviously over.”

Cote adds, “Depending on the airport, you could sweet talk your way on [with an oversize bike case]. I used to do that many times, but that absolutely does not happen any more. The fees are a lot, hundreds of dollars. I think that has changed a great deal.”

Please, no durians.

A rundown of overly-specific baggage restrictions

While some passengers may think Spirit Airlines’ “fee for everything” approach is a bit ridiculous, many carriers have stranger stipulations.

Most airlines, for instance, will allow you to carry on a walking stick, Gandalf style. Avianca allows you to check surfboards, kitesurfing equipment and even hang gliders for as little as \$100. Aeromexico stipulates that a single tennis racquet may be transported free of charge, while “bicycles with one seat and no motor” cost \$40. They also ask that you not carry on any bulky items, “like trophies or religious figures.” Air France will not permit any baggage measuring more than 10 feet in length — except, of course, pole vaulting poles.

The king of specific baggage restrictions, though, is Air China. Checked luggage can’t weigh less than 4.4 pounds or measure less than 23 linear inches. They also ask that baggage not be wrapped in a bamboo crate, mesh bag, rope, straw or a plastic bag. Guns for shooting competition may be checked, as long as the rifle case contains no more than two rifles, 11 pounds of gunpowder, a shooting mat, a silencer and small tools. Or, you can substitute two shotguns and two shotgun cases, or a case with five or fewer pistols. Carry-ons are restricted, too: please don’t bring “fresh perishable goods with distinct odors, such as seafood or durians.” A durian is a spiny fruit with a fetid smell likened to “turpentine and raw sewage.” Yes, please. No durians.



Quickly enforceable restrictions amount to easily collected fees. It’s like speeding on the highway: a little may go unnoticed, but too much will cost you.

A conservative approach would be to determine the most restrictive airline requirements for an upcoming trip and purchase luggage accordingly. But Sam Hirsch, owner of Tripquipment in Falmouth, Maine, says suggesting that to his customers would be a disservice. “I try to get them to think not for one trip but for a lot of trips,” Hirsch says. “Instead of buying a bag that will meet an immediate need, buy a bag that suits the majority of your trips. Being that I live in a secondary market, Portland, Maine, people say, ‘I fly to Portland all the time and I need a smaller bag because I use smaller planes.’ Why not make it easy on yourself? Buy the regular size carry-on and gate check it! They’re going to take the bag from you

and hand it to you when you get off the plane, not at the baggage claim. I prefer to travel as a carry-on traveler, but if I have to check my bag I will.”

“It also depends on who you’re dealing with,” Hirsch adds. “I travel with a RIMOWA Cabin Multiwheel International bag, which is a large carry-on. It pushes the limits, it’s a little wide, but it fits. I have been stopped only one time with that bag. It all depends, airport to airport and who you’re dealing with. When I go through TSA at Boston, they are relentless in terms of what they expect from passengers. You go to another airport and it’s the exact opposite: ‘No, you’re okay, go ahead.’ Also, I will tell you, how nice you are to the person when you’re at the gate, when you’re getting on board, that has a lot to do with it. There’s nothing exact. Get yourself a bag that will suit the majority of your trips.”