

Advice Sheet - Advice on International Flights and Keeping Luggage Secure

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Categories: Security

International air travel entails many concerns that do not affect domestic flights. These tips should help you avoid issues related to international air travel.

Selecting and Securing Luggage

- Checked luggage should be chosen with security in mind. It is recommended that it be well-used, hard-shelled and lockable. Avoid checked luggage with zippers. Consider a secondary measure to secure the bag, such as luggage belts or plastic wrap which may be available after security screening. For carry-on luggage, choose soft-sided, lockable, zippered bags. Take only what you need when traveling; if possible, use only carry-on luggage to prevent loss. Consider handbags, backpacks, fanny and tummy packs as a desirable target for thieves at any time.

Prior to Departure

- Ensure the airline has the correct information about who to contact in case of an emergency.
- Check with each airline on the itinerary for the number, weight, and size of carry-on items and checked baggage accepted, as well as additional fees that may be charged if you are over the limit.
- Inform the airlines on the itinerary if you are traveling with persons with special needs such as the elderly, disabled persons, children.
- Determine if and how any special needs will be met by the airline and/or the airport. In some countries, air carriers and airports must, by law, make appropriate accommodations for disabled persons. Some airports may not accommodate disabled travelers.

During the Flight

- Consider wearing compression socks if necessary to reduce swelling and pressure on the muscles in your legs, ankles, and feet. Plan to move around and drink plenty of water.
- Plan to arrive at airports for check-in at least three hours before your international flight.
- Be aware of any special security conditions and clearance requirements that may delay check-in. Arrive at the airport with enough additional time to accommodate these potential delays.

- If your flight is completely booked, or you are traveling during holidays or special events, plan to arrive earlier to avoid long lines.
- Know your airline's cancellation and rebooking policies.

On the Return

- Confirm your reservation and flight with the airline at least 72 hours before departing from an international destination.
- Know under what conditions an airline will not guarantee a seat. Some foreign airlines do not guarantee a seat even with a ticket that has been paid for and with a seat assignment made.
- Ensure that you can pay any departure or airport taxes. Many countries require that these be paid in cash with local currency.

Packing Checked Luggage

- Pack with the expectation that your luggage will be pilfered.
- Do not pack jewelry, passport, cash, or credit cards in your checked luggage.
- Remove batteries from devices to preclude drawing the attention of security or thieves.
- Ensure you remove tags and stickers from previous flights to prevent errors in routing luggage.

Packing Valuables and Medicines

- Carry the minimum valuables necessary and carry them on you or in carry-on luggage.
- If valuables are in carry-on luggage, keep them in a separate tote that you can remove. Smaller planes have smaller overhead bins.
- Use a concealed carrier for small valuables and important documents. One of the safest places to carry them is in an under-clothing pouch or concealed money belt.
- To lessen customs disruptions, keep prescription drugs in a carry-on bag and in their original, labeled containers. Bring a copy of each prescription and the generic name for each drug; if a medication is unique or contains narcotics, carry a letter from your doctor specifying your need.

Identifying Luggage

- Place a copy of your passport information page in each piece of luggage for positive identification in the event your bags are lost.
- Put your name, and a destination address and telephone number on a label inside each bag.
- Avoid using black luggage, as this is the most common for thefts, and use ribbon, colored tape or other unique means to identify your luggage.

- If you must use tags, use covered ones. Only include name and telephone number; preferably one at your destination, if known. Do not use business cards or business logos as luggage tags.
- Thieves sometimes use luggage tags to identify empty homes for burglary.

Locking Luggage

- If your departure country or destination allows, lock your luggage and secure bags with a strap, preferably one with a combination lock. Combination locks are more secure than key locks. Using locks approved by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration will reduce the chances that your lock will be cut off if security officials need to open your luggage but know that keys to these locks are readily available to anyone.
- If your departure or destination country does not allow locks, use an unlocked security strap but note it will increase the chance of your luggage to be chosen for hand inspection.
- If you do not use a security strap, run a strip of duct tape around the suitcase to prevent it from opening if dropped or mishandled. Pack a roll of tape so you can repeat the process.
- If locks can be used, reset multiple locks on suitcases to different combinations.

While Traveling

- When going through airport security, place your bags on the belt only as you are ready to walk through the magnetometer, not while still in a line. Immediately recover your belongings on the other side.
- Thieves are known to work in pairs. One thief stalls in front of you in line while the other removes your items from the other side of the machine.
- Keep your luggage in sight and close by at airports, railway stations or any public place.
- Switching bags is a common practice of thieves at transportation and hotel counters. To help prevent this, mark your piece with a ribbon or tape.
- Unattended luggage may be removed and or destroyed by security staff. If this happens, you will not be compensated.
- Do not approach or remain near someone else's unattended baggage.
- Do not agree to guard a stranger's luggage nor ask someone to do the same for you.
- Upon arrival, be present when luggage arrives at the baggage area, verify baggage claim checks and quickly inspect your luggage for tampering.
- If you must set down your luggage, place them against a wall or counter and maintain contact with them.
- Watch your luggage being loaded into your taxi or van at the airport and hotel. If possible, take your carry-ons inside the vehicle.
- If you take a taxi, pay the fare only after your luggage is unloaded and is under your control.

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